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## Captivated In Time

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

In Candidacy for the Degree of  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

“Captivated In Time”

Melissa S. Newcomb

May 2007

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I, Melissa Newcomb, hereby deny permission to the RIT Library of the Rochester Institute of Technology to reproduce my print thesis or dissertation in whole or in part.

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## **DEDICATION:**

I dedicate this thesis to my family for their support, love, and encouragement throughout my life. Many of the pieces are titled and remembered as special people in my life who have been a great inspiration to me and my family, and will live on in this body of work. I also dedicate and thank my committee Luvon Sheppard, Alan Singer, and Tom Lightfoot for their encouragement, time, and support in the process and completion of this endeavor.



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## Introduction

### Proposal

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and create a series of portraits of dolls. With this theme in mind, I will explore the idea of perfection in the design, construction, and representation of dolls. In the history of doll making, doll makers misunderstood girls' imaginations. (*Made to Play House*, 59) Eventually, designers began to question what a doll should look like, what it should represent, and what role it should play in the lives of children. Women and their experiences with textiles began making dolls soft and not brittle, or sharp because it was more like handling a real baby. Dolls were soft, portable, durable, and safe, not brittle or sharp, turning them into a more realistic form similar to a real baby.

In revisiting my childhood memories, I remember how passionate I was about my dolls (they were my companions growing up), and an increasing presence that eventually came to life in my own imagination. In reality, these dolls were only artificial objects that generated delusions of life, but played an important part in my childhood identity. I was learning how to be a mother by nurturing and attending to the care of this object, perfect in every detail. It was only natural to think it was real.

In a series of portraits I will be reconstructing dolls as objects of imperfection by recombining fragments of dolls from my past along with childhood images to form new identities. The dolls become disfigured bodies, and a recreation of life. I will therefore be reconstructing these dolls to suggest an image of invention to express shape, and my desire to give them a personal identity.

In a series of photo realistic paintings, I want to reflect upon my memories as a child and my relationship with dolls. The paintings will be reconstructions of dolls on canvas with various sections combined and layered to create a whole that works together, although not completely fit together, but is still recognizable and understood. The paintings of dolls will eventually evolve into dollhouses constructed in a similar format and pattern through scale and layering. The process will be the use of digital photographs, old photographs, and drawings, historical research on dolls and of my past memories. I have started to look at Ellen Phelan's Doll paintings that have the realism I want to achieve, and the use of lighting in the photographs by Laurie Simmons and Cindy Sherman. I will continue to visit Margaret Strong's collection of Dolls, Dollhouses, and miniatures at The Strong Museum. My approach and technique will refer to the work of David Hockney, Photo Realism, and Expressionism. In the continuation of my research I will be looking at dolls and the role they play in contemporary art and history.

## **“Captivated In Time”**

**Melissa Newcomb**

When I was growing up part of my time was spent playing outside with friends, but most of the time I played with my dolls and pretended they were real. I was in a fantasy world, where I could re-create my life in my imagination, with my own story and everything was perfect. My childhood with dolls was an important aspect of my identity in that I could create a life with artificial objects in my imagination through interaction, and pretend to play roles such as that of mother and teacher. During that time my childhood felt perfect and real, but it wasn't reality, I was just a child pretending and practicing to be an adult. Miriam Formaner Brunell said, “The portrayal of love between a doll and a girl, which often straddled the boundaries between maternal love and romantic love, was reciprocal, communicative, and passionate.” (Formanek-Brunell 24) Over time my interaction and collection of dolls grew until I reached an age when I left them behind to explore new interests and challenges.

The dolls of my past have now re-entered my life in the form of my artwork. As I grew from childhood to adulthood while I was no longer playing with dolls I was still collecting other things such as fabrics, china, jewelry, and household items that you would see in a doll house. My artwork has provided me with the opportunity to reflect upon my memories as a child and my relationship with dolls making them a part of my life once again. My childhood was a time when I was happy just playing and pretending to live the perfect life I had created in my mind; a place that I could control. Reflecting upon my past is an indication of who I am today along with what I bring into my artwork.

The dolls have become even more meaningful to me today because they helped me re-open my childhood memories.

The re-discovery of my past began when I visited my grandparent's attic where some of my mothers' dolls that I used to play with, were packed away in boxes. Seeing them again caused me to reflect on my childhood. The dolls' worn out dresses and matted down hair made them appear old and neglected, but not long ago they were clean and beautiful. Seeing their condition bothered me because it was as though they had served their purpose and were now forgotten. This reaction led me to document the dolls in the attic through digital photos and the images brought the dolls back to life. I made them appear perfect again by re-dressing and re-composing them into new identities.

When I was a child a doll was something I saved my weekly allowance for and so I took great care and a lot of time choosing one among many at the toy store. As I re-opened the past I reflected on who I was as a child and I could see how much I have changed as an individual. I viewed their faces, tangled hair, and wrinkled clothing of the dolls differently as a child. Now they are no longer my babies, just objects that have gotten old and out-dated. I felt emotionally and physically connected to them in that world that doesn't exist anymore. I wanted to bring that world and the feeling back through my paintings and photographs. I wanted to bring the dolls back to life.

Now as an adult the reality has set in nobody and nothing is perfect. I think I try to achieve that perfection but my attempts have never met my standards. Things worry me more, and things I thought to be beautiful as a child are viewed differently now. I have outgrown the play I enjoyed so much as a little girl and the dolls have outgrown their time. My dolls were beautiful to me as a child and I remember the feeling I had for



them but now the feelings no longer exist unless something triggers my memory like setting them out for display. New dolls are being made that are more realistic than what was available when I was a child. The sad part is, with new technology other toys are being produced limiting the interest in dolls within the marketplace. Children are no longer playing with dolls as much as they used to, preventing children from using their imagination and preparing them for motherhood. Society is changing as well, encouraging girls to pursue other interests. I was encouraged and shown how to care for my baby dolls. I was proud that someday I could be a mother.

Shown in figure 1 and 2, I have re-assembled a doll using layers to create a reconstruction of the doll with various sized fragments to represent a section of memory. In the production of many images of the doll for the final reconstructed image each fragment had a different scale, size, and color. Combining them created a unique and very appealing physical form. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that these images were the beginning stage and sketches for the paintings. The paintings that grew out of the initial contact with my past, the body for my thesis, have led to a deeper understanding of who I was and who I have become.

In reflecting upon this time in my childhood through my art I am looking for the compassion, beauty, and perfection in life that I don't think really exists, but I can create in a painting. The paintings can last a long time to show the appearance of the dolls always staying the same, and never changing. The dolls then remain perfect through time.

Figure 1



Melissa Newcomb  
Photo Collage 2006

Figure 2



Melissa Newcomb  
Photo Collage 2006

I am free in painting to exaggerate facial features making them appear more perfect and appealing and making some areas more detailed and finished than other areas. I dress them and almost play with them again as I restore how they were. It leaves room for whoever views the paintings to bring to the work their own thoughts, memories, and compassion they may have felt growing up. Other viewers who may have a similar connection with their dolls may also feel the connection I have expressed through my paintings. Here the dolls always live on as something perfect even though the dolls are really aging over time. Here they are on display to be looked at and enjoyed for their beauty as something that although out dated appear so perfect.

At the same time the dolls are fragmented because they don't quite belong together, just like my life isn't quite put together. Deconstructing them and rebuilding is

the way my life has gone, it is the process I go through to seek that unified whole of perfect life; purity; an abstraction of reality.

In most of my paintings, I exaggerate the eyes of the doll to confront the viewer. The fabric attached to the doll in the paintings adds an illusion of real to the artificial. The dolls appear to be real so the viewer can identify with the material and recognize what it is, and the painted fabric says this is just a painting. The painted fabric may look real but it's just made to look that way, really it's just an abstraction, a copy of something that does exist. Intricate details like strands of hair, eyelashes, and folds that are painted (along with subtle pieces of real fabric) are visible from a distance.

In the beginning the focus was just on the object itself "the doll", which explains the background area of flat color. Other elements had not been included yet because the research and thought behind the work was just beginning to evolve. Eventually the paintings start to have a place in time where the space has a more detailed environment, a room that seems small compared to a real room that would be so large in life. Every part of the doll is covered, wrapped, and packaged. Some of the coverings are transparent so you see through them, but nothing is behind the fabric, just pure color, light and shadow.

The paintings are autobiographical because they are about my life. I'm not afraid of the dolls, I feel at ease looking at them. Some dolls are sold with a label or name and some are not, leaving the owner to invent a name or label giving the doll its own identity and personality. In my life, dolls had an identity based on my imagination. In my work each representation has an identity based on my interpretation, involvement and thought. Each doll has a story of its own and is dressed and presented in a manner that represents the personality I have chosen. Although each doll looks and is dressed different perhaps



one was played with more than another. The paintings have various sections of unfitted parts that are to be played with in the viewers mind. I leave it open for the viewer to resolve how they fit together based on their own thoughts and memories. Perhaps this rekindles memories of dolls they once had and how they related to them. These unfitted parts could be moved around but I have placed them in certain spots in the painting because, while I feel the body is interchangeable, the face should remain the same. The body image can change but the face is the constant stable point of the painting. I leave the body sections so the viewer can dress them. As for the face: I want it to remain the same; because the face describes the character of the doll. To me, it is the most perfect part of the doll and doesn't need to be changed.

All of these paintings have an identity, which has been informed by my identity, but as objects they do have a life of their own. The paintings communicate through the details and exaggerations of the dolls appearance. They have a face, and everything is recognizable but may not always belong together, they are put together as if they do fit and make up a perfect object. They are put together this way because it's how I view dolls and it's my way of communicating how I feel about perfection through placement and arrangement.

The history of doll making is so important in the evolution of my paintings. In doll making, male inventors used hard substances like sheet metal and wood to make dolls. The wood dolls and metal dolls would convey a beauty that appealed to American consumers. However, because they were not soft and pliable dolls were becoming too much like machines, and they were too controlled, children were not able to use their imaginations or even have a companion. (Tosa 16)

“In the nineteenth Century the doll took on a formal identity as a toy. Some were inclined to be heavy or awkward to handle because of the materials and techniques used in manufacture but its what appealed to the nineteenth century middle class child.” (Tosa 20) “With dolls, children learned about the realities of life, and customs and manners were often directly learned through play. With dolls children are able to practice and act out the lessons of adult life.” (Tosa 21) I remember as a child acting out these roles and pretending to be the mother figure. “In the past children were highly encouraged to emulate the adult females around them.” (Tosa 21) I emulated the role of an adult during play with my dolls. So when I read the history on children being encouraged to take on these roles, I felt a connection and knew I was in the right place researching and painting dolls.

“Izannah Walker, Martha Chase, and Ella Smith were the doll makers who used the textile stockinet since it was lightweight, elastic, washable, and durable.” (Formanek-Brunell 68) The doll had to be lightweight so that children could handle them more easily. “The dolls were to be safe and harmless. While some female and male doll inventors aimed for naturalism, women were more likely to refer to soft dolls for the touch because of some in the past that had rigidity, those stuffed with horse hair, and saw-dust.” (Formanek-Brunell 72) In the end children preferred the soft dolls.

In trying to achieve the realism in a doll, Chase used images of real children in order to paint three-dimensional portraits of doll faces with her own oil paints. Dolls started to look more realistic than ever since close attention was paid to proportions. I think this was a very important point in history. Dolls were also made to be washable to

stop the spread of germs to children. “The doll industry was booming and always changing to meet up to the standards of life.” (Formanek-Brunell 72)

The creation of the doll being soft is something I try to achieve in my paintings. The use of the smooth textured canvas and blending of color to almost a blur represents them as soft. Although some edges in my paintings appear to be sharp and almost like a cutout, it's only to make them come forward. This helps elaborate on the actual look of plastic or skin as very soft, a delicate texture that appears on the faces of my paintings. The sharper edge helps define the contours of the form. The doll is really only a representation of something else whether it is a woman, man, child, or baby. Surrounded in the world by adults, a child only performs actions of play with a doll that imitates actions carried out by the child's mother. It was about dressing the doll with whatever outfit that was appropriate for the event of the day. (Formanek-Brunell 22)

“All Children talk to their toys; the toys become actors in the great drama of life, brought down to size by the camera obscura of their young minds, and their children demonstrated through play their great capacity for abstraction and their enormous imaginative powers.” (Tosa 22) “Everything becomes a creative expression, toys offer the child an introduction to art, or rather to the practical application of art, and no work of art, however perfect, will give rise in an adult to the same enthusiasm the same certainty.” (Tosa 23) Relating to my own experience with dolls, I enjoy watching other children relate to their dolls as though they were real.

Margaret Woodbury Strong had a passion for collecting, and now The Strong Museum today honors her collections in Rochester, New York. Her increasing interest was collecting dolls, doll houses, and toys. When I visited her collection I was



overwhelmed with the amount of objects. Each doll was different and worn from being held by its original owners. Each doll appeared to be staring at me through the cases as though they were telling me that they all had a life which was seen through their eyes and the aging of their clothing, face, and hair. The doll houses I found the most fascinating were extremely detailed, and the miniature objects displayed had a high society, almost rich, look to them. As a child this place would have been a fantasy land. I saw similarities to my paintings because the dolls in my paintings would look real without the detail. It was amazing to see what was real in the past, and how they are present today. I also realized that I wasn't just a painter but a doll painter, a subject that has been and still remains popular among many artists. Artist's have influenced me and inspired me to pursue something that has a great legacy, history, and continues to live on today.

In the work of painter Ellen Phelan, while she portrays dolls differently than I do, some of the thoughts behind the work are almost the same. "Her images of dolls convey more humor and vulnerability of being alive through their various poses." (Armstrong 14) Her paintings are done through observation by working from life. I observe through my photographs. However her work is similar in that she achieves a sense of realism, and her images emphasize the idea of being "gazed upon, to be played with." (Armstrong 25) The sense of realism is something I'm improving upon in my paintings, and to be "gazed upon, and to be played with" is one of the major ideas I am working with in my paintings. All the fragments are moveable and not permanently attached so they can potentially be played with. I already feel as though I'm playing with the pieces because they are in block format and I'm building upon them with paint like a child would play with blocks. The doll's eyes are enlarged so that the doll appears to be making direct eye

contact with the viewer emphasizing a relationship between the doll and the viewer through my paintings.

I referred to Ellen's work in the beginning stages of making my own doll paintings. I was interested in her approach because it was the same subject matter and only dealing with a few different ideas behind the doll. I find her subtle approach and almost foggy, blurriness, and "atmospheric haze" or rendering them "visually distant" quite interesting. The objects become these "figures stranded in time." (Armstrong 14) The feeling and physical appearance of the dolls in the paintings provide me with a sense of past and also present. The dolls are not what we see today they are of a different time. Each one has a presence in the placement and the role they play on the surface of the painting. Ellen states: "When you play with dolls, they are animated by the projection of imagination. As opposed to the material projected by a child, the material I was projecting was adult." (Armstrong 15) She also states: "It really had to do with emotional relationships between men and women, mothers and daughters, gender definition and how it comes about, the female sense of self." (Armstrong 13) In a way these relationships are about women and what its like to be a female and it happens a little in my paintings and could be interpreted in a similar way, only it wasn't something I was trying to achieve. I was reflecting more upon memories from childhood up to my adult life.

I begin to play with dolls by dressing the dolls in fabrics, by attaching fabrics and attaching square or rectangular canvases in the shape of blocks that can be moveable and played with mentally while playing with them since they were not permanently attached. Ellen makes a distinction between the child's imagination and her adult imagination. The

distinction in my work is that because the actual dolls have aged they no longer look the way I have presented them in the paintings. I have presented them the way they looked in my imagination while growing up. However, they are displayed as the main focus with subtle introductions of textured wall-paper and fabric which make them appear to be on display with the majority of the backgrounds appearing very flat. As a child my dolls were not on display, but played with and appreciated. Now, I view the dolls as a fragment of time that is lost and I'm bringing them back by playing with the canvases and attaching the clothing as I did in my childhood fantasies with the dolls.

Figure 3 is an image of Ellen Phelan's work that I referred to and Figure 4 is one of the first paintings I did by attaching the fabric and canvas's to the surface. Here I was trying to strive for the idea of realness much like Ellen Phelan did.

Figure 3



Ellen Phelan XIX. *Traveling Costume*, 1987.  
Richard Armstrong (pg 16)

Figure 4



Melissa Newcomb  
"A Fragment of Time (Cindy)" 2006



In Figure 4 I kept the background flat and simple, I didn't want to include anything that would detract from the focus on the doll. I painted the background blue to compliment the pink dress and flesh tones within the plastic of the face. In some areas the paint is loose giving a more expressive quality where other areas are tighter and more realistic looking. I wanted it to be about the fabric and the association of real versus artificial. From a distance one might ask whether that lace is painted or real. The material didn't have much perspective and some of the fabric looked just placed where other areas created an illusion as it folded and bended around the edges. I never intended for this to happen in the first painting, but it was working successfully.

I continued to work on two other paintings that would become more complex as I started to add more canvases and fabric. I started to think about breaking out of the square and rectangular format which is the more traditional shape of a painting. I started to put the canvases together by layering as I did with the photographic images in the very beginning. It was like I was building and constructing the doll again using my own process like a child would as they built things out of blocks.

As a result, I produced an image that was cut out and began to play with the space around it where the negative space became a part of the painting. I attached the pieces together in the back with strips of wood that were stapled into the canvas to hold it together. After working on it for a while I began to start eliminating pieces that didn't quite fit together. These scrap pieces just became extras that were laid on the floor of my studio. I was then thinking what if I want to remove these pieces and move them around, play with them? So I started to think of an alternative. It was brought to my attention to try working with Velcro and I liked the idea of using a material I could remove if needed.

Figure 5 is the painting where I started to think about breaking away from the traditional shape of a canvas. In the process of this painting the background color changed twice. I found with the first color that it was too dark because it gave the doll an eerie feel. I found putting in a flat color helped bring out the eyes of the doll which became more alive and real.

Figure 5



Melissa Newcomb  
"A Fragment of Time (Barbara)" 2006

As I continued into the third painting I decided to go back to the traditional format but not forgetting what I just completed in Figure 5, because I knew it was something I would go back to or elaborate on in the paintings to come in this series. I knew when the painting was taken out of the traditional format with the negative space coming through and around each section, it exaggerated the fact that the separated parts didn't really belong together, that they were parts of different dolls. When attached to a traditional square or rectangular base it was easier to resolve at this stage of my process. The pieces were put together by arrangement and alignment to compose a composition that fit together and worked. I felt more comfortable because it was the typical size and shape of a canvas. In figure 6, I started to think about different sized canvas and adding more into the main canvas. I also tried to work a little larger as I was feeling more confident and



comfortable with this subject matter. In this painting I thought a lot more about the arrangement of the canvas ahead of time before attaching them with Velcro. I also started to think more about depth and how I could achieve it using different thicknesses of wood for the frame and going larger than what I had used before.

Figure 6



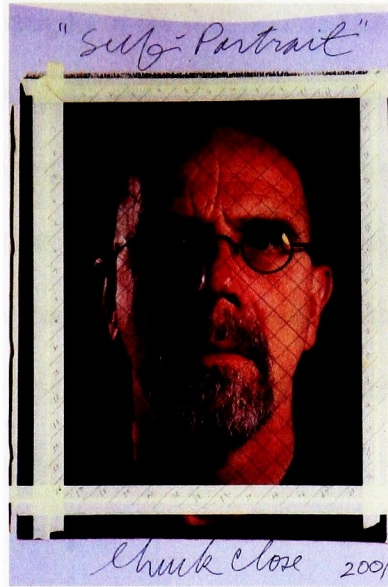
I also started to think about the finished qualities of a painting and why couldn't it be black and white with no color? When reflecting upon my memory most of the images are a shade of black and white and only a few in colors. So I started to experiment with drawing on the canvas as well as painting but not developing every section of the painting. Some sections were a sketch and remained that way. Other areas went a little further but would remain an under painting. In the drawn areas I experimented with pencil and lighter fluid, the lighter fluid allowed the drawing pencil to move easier giving the image more fluidity and a painterly feel. Then, I saw that some of the areas which had

one transparent layer of paint had even more of an attractive quality than the more finished areas. Since I was working with fabric, the transparency of the lighter fluid with pencil, and the subtle transparent painted areas I started to ask, what if I included fabric that was transparent? This is when I started to bring in fabric that you could see through which added another element of depth on top of what was behind this fabric. While thinking about the transparent material, I was thinking about some paintings I did in the past with dolls wrapped in cellophane and the work of Rosenquist who also did paintings of dolls wrapped in plastic.

I was thinking about how I wanted my viewers to really see and feel about these pieces. I discovered the paintings were full of color and life and I wanted them to be enjoyed because they were almost a portrait of my life. The memory of my childhood could be connected with others who had similar dolls. Each painting had an identity, and was perfected to my standards. It turned out when going through the process of reconstructing the doll as a whole the image resulted into an almost perfect doll. The work was becoming very exciting and attractive to people, and I knew in the end something wonderful was going to happen within these pieces.

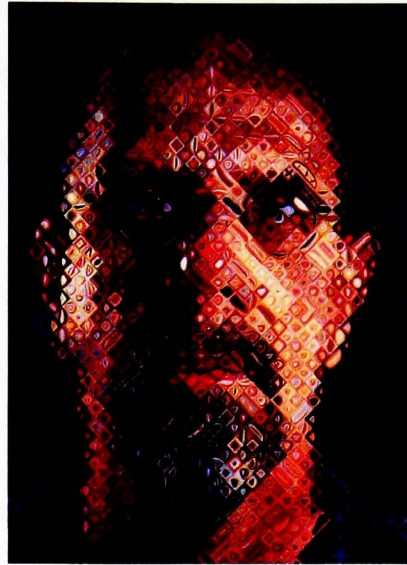
In researching the work of Chuck Close and visiting an exhibition of his work in Buffalo I was amazed by his process. The scale, detail and color were just incredible to see in person. Figure 7 is an example of how he begins his work with a photograph that is gridded and numbered. Then he re-represents the color into the block he gridded off on his canvas as shown in figure 8. I find his approach similar to mine since he starts with a photograph, and blocks it off in grids as I do.

Figure 7



Chuck Close, *Maquette for Self Portrait*, 2001  
Polaroid with artist's tape mounted on Foamcore  
33 1/4 x 22"  
Kirk Varnedoe (pg 13)

Figure 8



Chuck Close, *Self Portrait*, 2000-2001  
Oil on Canvas  
108 x 84"  
Kirk Varnedoe (pg 18)

He may not be working with the doll as the subject matter, but he is still working with the portrait of somebody and recreating it in a very realistic but expressive way. Each block is just color that is very expressive and free. Stepping back it all comes together as a whole which happens in all of my work. However I do not break up the surface as much but I do use the photograph as my sketch, as he does. I related to his work the most because of his approach and thought process. I did not grid my canvas out perfectly, however it did take a lot of thought. Before touching the canvas with a brush and paint, it was sketched out in pencil and measured out as to where the blocks were going to be placed. In some form it did take on the dimension of a grid in the beginning stages.

While I was working on the doll paintings I was also thinking about doll houses and how I might like to include a doll house in this body of work. I started working with cut-out papers such as wall paper, actual doll house wood, windows, and doors. I



received permission to photograph the doll house furniture and miniatures in a store. I also had photographs of the doll houses I had seen at the Strong Museum that I used as references. The dolls and doll houses at Strong were kept in cases that caused a bit of a glare in the photographs. I found it interesting in the glass covering of all these objects that my reflection was being captured in the image through the glare. I decided to bring myself into the imagery of the dollhouse using childhood photographs. I experimented with images of my childhood that I transferred onto paper using acetone. I used the transfers in the dollhouse behind windows. I didn't put my childhood images any place else because I wanted the room to be viewed and appreciated for the details and patterns. Adding images of my childhood in the windows was subtle and appealing. The acetone transfers had an aged appeal. At this point the doll house was a two dimensional piece. Each room was its own separate block. So many ideas were possible with the doll house but it was going in another direction from the doll paintings and was far too complex to bring together with them at this point. However, it is my next project to pursue after the completion of my thesis work. I found the dollhouse valuable in the growth and process of these paintings.

The wall paper from the original doll house idea was included in the subsequent doll paintings. I was thinking about this along with patterns and fabrics in general. I began looking at the work of Miriam Schapiro as shown in figure 9.

As a result I began to use wall paper in the background as shown in figure 10 along with shadows to make the doll look like it was sitting. The wall paper added to the three dimensional quality of this painting and in some areas appeared to look like a drawing.

Figure 9



Miriam Schapiro, *Patience*. 1977.  
Acrylic and Fabric Collage on Canvas  
30 x 22"  
Gouma-Peterson, Thalia, (pg 81)

Figure 10



Melissa Newcomb  
"A Fragment of Time (Beulah)" 2007

In the areas where wall-paper was attached, the pattern was very subtle and soft which appears to some people as a sketch. I chose wall-paper that was subtle and soft but never thought it would appear as a drawing. I had moved on from working with a flat color in the background to bringing in different shades of color and using shadows and wall-paper to give a more realistic feel to the doll and its environment. It was finally time to start including a place where my memories stemmed from because the paintings were developing and I was growing in the process.

In considering all these new things I also went back to playing with the cut-out shape of the doll in Figure 11 especially focusing on areas that appeared to look more finished over others. The colors in this painting were very rich, vibrant and had a romantic quality to them because of the transparent dark burgundy colored fabric that lies over the painted surface. The painted area underneath the fabric was coming through and

it almost looked like it was part of the fabric but it needed to be more transparent. I wanted the painting and the reality of the fabric to work together. The fabric I had originally chosen was too flat and opaque. The painting originally had a pink background that was subtle, like the color I remember in my bedroom as a child. I changed the color to a deep, rich red because it's a color I enjoy now but was mixed with the pink I remember growing up. The fabric I was working with didn't have the transparency or translucency like the final piece of fabric I added. I chose a piece of material that would work with the colors in the painting and was subtle and not heavy, flat, and opaque as the original piece I had chosen. The painting came together through color, fabric choice and arrangement perfectly. Rather than gluing the fabric, which I had done in Figure 10 where the glue came through the fabric giving it a wet look, I decided to actually try to sew it through the canvas to attach the fabric and it worked. This gave the painting something more real to look at, and allowed me to dress the doll in a more permanent way.

I decided it was time to do a much larger painting. The scale could be very empowering. This painting would be the painting that would bring all of the work I had already completed together; it would become the focal point. I didn't refer to any artists while working on this painting I just let it be free and happen with what I had already learned and researched. I started to develop the face of the doll and it was obvious my skills had improved with the detail and accurate proportions and color of the doll's face.

As I continued with this painting there was a lot to think about because of the scale. The larger canvases that were being attached were heavier. Instead of using black and white drawings like I did in one of the previous pieces, I took a monochromatic color



scheme in two of the canvases, and the rest of the canvases attached to the surface would be in full color.

Figure 11



Melissa Newcomb  
"A Fragment of Time (Joyce)" 2007

The two pieces worked together, but remained a work in progress through the stages of the development of the painting as a whole. The background color would change, and even began to get darker in color, and this was not something that was working for me. I was actually having nightmares about it because something just wasn't fitting together. So I changed the color to red. The whole painting began to work together and became more balanced as shown in Figure 12.

I also decided to leave some of what was there before as a simple line that ran down one side of the painting. It appeared to me to be an opening of what would be next. It looked like two doors opening and the view behind them. I then was questioning whether to add fabric but I had rendered the painting so strongly to a completed stage it wasn't needed. I did need to include some other element like the wall-paper or a pattern.

I decided, rather than attach the wall-paper it needed to be more controlled, and so I decided to paint a pattern that looked like wall-paper.

In the darker section of the painting it looked almost like velvet. The dark glazes I used in the pattern were very attractive. The pattern had a very elegant and romantic aspect and brought the whole painting together. Out of all of the paintings I felt the most attached to this one because of the scale, and because I could see how my skills had developed and grown.

Figure 12



Melissa Newcomb  
"A Fragment of Time (Margaret)" 2007

There was still another painting I was working on alongside this one which is shown in Figure 13. In this painting I used more of a cut-out of the rectangular/square shape of a traditional canvas. I also wanted to experiment with painting on another kind of fabric other than canvas, so I stretched fabric over wood frames and did an outlined tracing of the dolls lower half. It turned out I did not like the way the paint moved on the fabric and only filled color in the background giving the doll a cut out shape almost like a



paper doll. It was very simple and minimal making it attractive and appealing. I did however develop the doll's face more but was able to bring the two halves together by using an orange fabric. The fabric picked up the color in the doll's face that was draped over the lower half and brought the sections together.

Figure 13



Melissa Newcomb  
"A Fragment of Time (Kay)" 2007

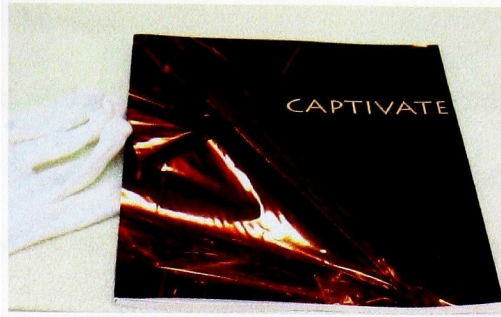
This painting was not one of my favorites at first because it didn't look as complete as all the others. However it didn't have to be completed. It was open for the viewer to complete in their own mind. The painting was different from the others because it was the beginning of where these paintings could lead to next. It became a great piece to complete the series and leave that thought open.

Along the side wall of my studio lay about five to six canvas's that were extra pieces that did not fit into all of the paintings I had completed. I was thinking about including them with the other work, either hanging them below the paintings or just

laying them on the floor along with scraps of wall-paper and fabric. The layout would have the appearance of my studio or how dolls and doll clothes might look in a child's room. I played with the arrangement of them along with the arrangement of the paintings on the walls before the installation of the show and I had not come to a final decision as to how everything was going to be presented. I would resolve it in the space I was given. In the hanging of the show I decided to eliminate the idea of including the extra canvases on the floor along with scraps of fabric and wallpaper. After seeing the space and the paintings hung, they all stood on their own and adding the materials on the floor detracted from the work. Plus the gallery floor was brick so there were all these fragments in the floor and it was too distracting. It ended up being a great decision in the presentation of the work shown in Figure 15.

Along with the paintings I had been working on a book that included a nice layout of some of my photos where the dolls were wrapped in plastic. I did some research as to what I wanted the title to be because I wanted it to suggest the book was just about the images, and not text. I also wanted a title that would represent my thesis. I came up with the word "Captive" with three other words that would define it in a subtle way: Beauty, Charm, and Delight. The book which is shown in Figure 14 became a great success. It was great to work with another designer who helped with the layout and design and printing of the book. In the end, the book kept the title with the other three words on the next page, Beauty, Charm, and Delight which said everything it needed to.

Figure 14



Melissa Newcomb  
“Captive” (Digital Printed Book) 2007

When it was time to install the show each painting needed a title and I decided to give them all the same title, but distinguishing them by names of people who were a part of my life, past and present. I did not tell anyone this and I was hoping family members coming to the show would be honored or touched by the names. Each painting was titled “A Fragment of Time (and the name).”

Figure 15



Melissa Newcomb, Master of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition. (2007)

During the Opening my family did notice the names of the paintings and they were so touched. Several people told me which paintings they could relate to more or which ones were their favorite. I found it interesting and exciting to see the viewers

relate to the work. It was a great crowd and something I will always remember. So many people enjoyed the show and the work.

Even after the closing of the thesis show I continued to receive comments and feedback on the work, and it was good to hear the impact it had on people. It was my goal all along to make an impression on people and have something they could relate to and remember within their own experiences. It was a wonderful journey up to this point and so much was learned and remembered along the way.

I see this work continuing on after the completion of my education. I am already thinking about my ideas for a doll house project and how I plan to execute the ideas along with some other plans for the future. I think in the success and growth through my years being educated, this was a great ending as a student. This body of work was so deep and meaningful to me in every aspect of my life and I was happy to be able to share this with everyone. The dolls will live on in these paintings and they will always be present and real to me and I hope others will remember them in such a way. They will remain as something captivated in time.



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